

DIPPING INTO THE FUTURE

THE IDEAS OF MR. H. G. WELLS.

ANTICIPATIONS OF THE REACTION OF MECHANICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS UPON HUMAN LIFE AND THOUGHT. By H. G. Wells. Octavo, pp. 248. Harper & Bros.

Mr. Wells essays to give us in this interesting volume a logical forecast of future developments of our civilization, based upon past achievements and present conditions and tendencies. The forms of narrative and romance which he has hitherto employed are discarded for that of simple and direct philosophizing. This mode of treatment brings his work more directly within the sphere of critical consideration. It also makes more apparent the limitations of his philosophy and its failure to grasp all the essential features of the case. This is indeed hinted at in the title of the book, which is not so much a name or a description as an anticipatory proposition. Mr. Wells may speak of "the reaction of mechanical and scientific progress upon human life and thought," but he has yet to demonstrate the actuality or the certainty of such reaction. Beyond doubt, if such reaction occurs, it may be along the lines of his Anticipations. So far as some of the changes are concerned, to wit, those which pertain to what we may term the mechanical side of human life, it may well be that his anticipations will be realized with tolerable accuracy. Thus it is altogether probable that there will in the near future be a considerable increase and improvement of automobile locomotion, which, together with other means of transit, will materially modify the distribution of population. Cities may become diffused into huge "urban districts" of a hundred miles or more in extent. The same circumstances, conjoined with further development of the telephone, may also produce a change in methods of conducting business. Beyond that, Mr. Wells has a vision—most alluring, we must confess, and by no means beyond the range of credible practicality—of the adoption of mechanical devices for the performance of domestic duties, and thus the solution, in large part, of the harassing "servant girl problem." His special roads for automobiles, his moving sidewalks, his awning covered streets, his automatic window washer and his flying ships in war time—literally the "airy navies" grappling in the central blue," espied in fancy by the strabularious young man of Locksley Hall—may all come to pass within the lifetime of men now living. If so, they will be no more wonderful, and induce no greater change in human economy, than other things which we have seen accomplished in our own time.

We may grant, too, the possibility of other of Mr. Wells's anticipations, some gladly, some with reluctance. His vision of the world's coming to an all but universal war, in which whole nations will be engaged without distinction between combatants and non-combatants, is unpleasantly foreboding, and we cannot concede that it would be a legitimate development of the spirit and tendencies of these times. Doubtless war on land and sea is becoming more and more a matter of science and mechanics, organized and conducted by experts. But that very fact should surely operate against any such universal orgy of destruction as that which Mr. Wells foresees. We believe the tendencies of the age are distinctly toward peace, and we believe the increasingly scientific character of warfare operates powerfully in the same direction. From the purely mechanical or physical point of view it is to be believed that wars and dangers of wars are diminishing, and will continue to diminish, though they may never quite disappear. As to linguistic developments, it is more easy to agree with Mr. Wells, though we must take exception to his studied sneer at the English language, or at the use of it. Faulty it may be, and much dreary rubbish is put forth in it. Yet those, or many of them, "who think and write and translate and print and put forth" do even now "make it worth the world's having." It is possible, and indeed not improbable, as Mr. Wells thinks, that English, French and German will be the great, growing, aggregating languages of the future, which will more and more prevail throughout the world, and which will more and more reduce others to subsidiary use or to local rank. Spanish, it is true, has an enormous hold upon the world, and Italian is still a growing tongue, while Chinese and Russian and other semi-civilized vehicles of speech are likely to exist for ages. But the present and seemingly inexorable tendency is toward the prevalence of the three great tongues of Western Europe, which even now far outrank in importance all others in the world.

All these suggested changes or developments have chiefly to do with the mechanical functions of human life, and they are presented by Mr. Wells with much ingenuity and plausibility. He is a past master in the art of conceiving mechanical progress. But the limits of that art mark his own limitations. When he seeks to go beyond them he may retain subjective confidence, but he no longer impresses the reader with conviction. Mechanical progress is not an anticipation; it is a reality. But "progressive mechanical civilization" is another and a very different thing. Civilization is not machinery. It is not the creature, but the creator; not the slave, but the master of machinery. Its dominant factors are not only altogether superior to machinery and to all technical science, but are as we may well believe, incapable of being modified by these. That which we may comprehensively call human nature is not machine-made, nor machine-altered. So far as the utmost range of historical research indicates, it is a substantially unchanging and unchangeable thing. It is to-day in every essential particular just about what it was "in the days of old Babel." And we cannot help thinking that the radical fault in Mr. Wells's "Anticipations" is in so cavalierly subordinating this immutable factor to the influence of its own creatures.

The supposition that society will be and will remain divided into two great classes, the one composed of stockholders in all sorts of enterprises and the other of expert engineers, is little more than fantastic. It presupposes a stability of industrial and commercial affairs such as the world is never likely to see. To the end of business time, we may well believe, there will be "booms" and "panics." Men will grow rich, and men will become poor. And these incessant fluctuations will be promoting engineers to be stockholders, and sending now and then even the richest stockholders back to the workshop. There will also, despite all mechanical progress, continue to be an enormous mass of laborers, of one kind or another, who are neither capitalists nor expert engineers. Mechanical development offers no promise of ever getting on without such a class. And the statistics hopelessly discredit the theory, to which Mr. Wells seems to incline, that through decay of vitality this class will disappear. We cannot agree with the author's political outlook. It is fine to talk of a New Republic, and to describe it as "a world-state of capable, rational men." But we can see no promise of it any nearer than was that of Plato's. Machines—of the kind meant by Mr. Wells—do not make politics or government. They are not likely to affect it. The farmer who operates a steam harrower is in politics very much the same as he was who swung a cradle or a scythe. The multitudes who work in our vast factories take just about the same views of civil polity as did their ancestors who formed mobs to resist the introduction of the factory system. Mr. Wells speaks of democracy as having arisen in the latter part of the eighteenth century, along with the development of mechanism and industrial organization. To our mind, it was pretty well advanced twenty odd centuries before, in Greece and in Persia. The three chiefs, namely, who discussed the future government of Persia after the overthrow of the Magi left very little to be said, save by way of repetition, concerning the relative merits of democracy, aristocracy and monarchy.

The trouble with Mr. Wells's ingenious book is that it assumes that the future can be done by machinery. They cannot. The deus ex machina is an imperishable and a most potent fact. In the present case that fact is simply human nature, which for thousands of years has asserted itself in politics, in the social order, in domestic life, and in morals, incessantly and immutably. If it has known no change in forty

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THE MOST PITEOUS VICTIM OF THE TERROR.

MME. DE LAMBALE. By Georges Bertin. Translated into English by Arabella Ward. 12mo, pp. 337. Godfrey A. S. Weiners.

Among all the victims of the Terror there was none whose fate was more terrible than that of Marie Thérèse Louise de Savoie-Carignan, Princesse de Lamballe. High minded, pure of heart, a most loyal and gentle lady, there is little to be reckoned against her in comparison with other women of the ancien régime.

She was a dainty and graceful little creature in her eighteenth year, a good, sweet and lovable maiden, when she came from Turin to France in 1767 to marry the handsome Prince de Lamballe, the son of the kind old Duc de Penthièvre. The boy of nineteen straightway fell in love with the girl—and remained in love perhaps three weeks, as befitted one with the mingled blood of the magnificent King Louis and the Montespan in his veins. His faithfulness to his devoted young wife ended only with his early death from dissipation. With the old duke, his father, his widow spent the larger part of her life thereafter, being in all respects a loving and cherished daughter. Neither the old man nor the fair woman cared for gayety; their tastes were simple, and the occupations of country life fully satisfied them. It would have been well for the princess had she discouraged the growing affection of Marie Antoinette and refused, for the sake of her quiet life, the appointment as superintendent of the royal household—an office which had for some years been in abeyance. The large salary attached to it and the favors which she asked from the king and queen for those dear to her were the head and front of her offending in the eyes of the public—yet these ought to have passed into nothingness before the shameless greed of Mme. de Polignac, who presently became her successful rival in the friendship of the queen.

In those last years the princess suffered from a nervous ailment and spent much time at various watering places. This, as well as Mme. de Polignac's influence, tended to make her relations with the queen less close. But when the darkest days came it was her rival who fled to safety away from the falling house, and it was the Piedmontese princess who hurried back to the "jaws of the tiger" in Paris to help and comfort her friend. When on the famous 20th of June the mob baited Marie Antoinette in the council hall of the Tuilleries with every kind of ingenious insult, the pale invalid princess leaned steadfastly behind the queen's chair, supporting her through all those dreadful hours. When the royal family was taken to the Temple the princess looked her last upon her friend. Her own imprisonment in La Force was a short one, as all know. At the end of the mock trial in the small room crowded with filthy, drunken creatures, with the moans of the dying sounding from the courtyard, the princess was ordered to swear hatred toward the queen, the king and the royal family. Her resolute refusal ended the scene, and the president's order to take her to the Abbaye was her death sentence.

At that moment some men with haggard eyes and bare arms red with blood rushed toward the poor creature and dragged the princess away. Scarcely had she crossed the threshold when she received, they say, on the back of her head a blow from a sabre. She was covered with blood, her hair was loosed, hands continued to push her; she staggered over corpses with which she was forced to come into contact; she could scarcely stand. At last she fell back exhausted. She was immediately raised, two men seized her by the arms and compelled her to move on.

Enough; those who care to read of the murder of an innocent and tender woman, perpetrated with such bestial horrors as would not enter into the imaginations of savages, must turn to M. Bertin's book. He quotes several accounts of the tragedy, and all are heartrending. He quotes also the curious document penned by a municipal officer in the service of the Temple—the functionary who persuaded the murderers to give up their intention of showing to the imprisoned queen the princess's desecrated head, pallid under its blood soaked frame of glorious golden hair, and the naked mangled trunk dragged through the mud of the street. "I made heroes of them," he says. "I told them that the spoils they brought were the property of all. . . . Should you deprive the city of the pleasure of sharing your triumph? Night will soon be here; hasten therefore to leave this place, which is too narrow for your glory. At the Palais Royal in the Garden of the Tuilleries, where so many times has been trampled under foot the sovereignty of the people, you should place this trophy, an everlasting monument of the victory you have won. This 'absurd harangue,' as its author calls it, at least answered its purpose, and Marie Antoinette was saved from one unforgettable misery.

Why was the princess sacrificed so soon and with such ferocity? The accusation that she was plotting to release the king and queen was a makeshift of which proof was not even attempted. If her services to the royal household and the favors bestowed upon her by the queen had cost the nation much money, there were others at court who had received as much or more, and who had not her helpful and benevolent nature and habits. The theory that Robespierre had persuaded her to advocate to the king his appointment as tutor to the Dauphin, and at the failure of his scheme had organized the murder to destroy all evidences of his ambition, is not reasonable. Equally unproved is

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another theory, that the triumvirate who condemned her did so because she had not been able to induce the queen some months before to consent to their nomination to the ministries of Justice, of the Interior, and of Finance. Students of the period who have some acquaintance with the character of that unclean dastard Philippe Egalité, Duc d'Orléans, have thought it not impossible that he had some concern in the princess's murder. He was her brother-in-law and next heir to her share of the Duc de Penthièvre's enormous wealth. When, moreover, his wife was forced by his peculiarly atrocious indecencies and open insult to leave him and seek refuge with her father, the Duc d'Orléans accused the Lamballe of having urged the separation, and she was, we are told, from that time the object of his hatred. Mme. de Tourzel, a woman as good as she was wise, frankly notes without refutation the statement that this hatred "was one of the causes of the unfortunate end of the unhappy princess." We shall probably never know the truth; but Egalité was not the man to be specially wronged by such a conjecture.

This book is not as graphic as it might be in its picture of court life under Louis XVI, the translation is often stiff and too literal, and we note inaccuracies which may be due in some cases to bad proofreading. With all its faults, however, it has the interest with which eighteenth century France invests even the most careless chronicler.

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